



Passing the BATON

*Foreign Policy Challenges and
Opportunities Facing the New Administration*

Afternoon Panel One: “Security and Political Reform in the Greater Middle East”

Speakers: **Mona Yacoubian**, Special Advisor, Muslim World Initiative, United States Institute of Peace;
Samer Shehata, Assistant Professor of Arab Politics, Georgetown University;
Shuja Nawaz, Director of the South Asia Center at The Atlantic Council of the United States
Daniel Brumberg, Special Advisor, Muslim World Initiative, United States Institute of Peace

Main Issues

Against a backdrop of escalating domestic, regional and global security challenges, this panel considered the future of U.S. efforts to promote political reform in the Greater Middle East. Panelists present the findings and recommendations of USIP’s Study Group on Reform and Security in the Muslim World. Co-chaired by Larry Diamond and Francis Fukuyama, the Group first convened in February 2008 to offer decision makers recommendations on how the United States can best promote political reform in the Muslim World while safeguarding American security interests.

Despite growing doubts that democracy promotion can be reconciled with competing U.S. security concerns in the Middle East, the Group’s findings, as articulated by Daniel Brumberg, suggest that political reform in the Muslim world provides a durable basis for domestic and regional political stability. Thus, the United States should not uncritically abandon the freedom agenda in favor of *realpolitik*-driven policies. Rather, Washington must devise ways to reinvent its democracy promotion strategies by addressing past shortcomings; most notably, by pursuing regional security interests and reform in tandem. Resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict could pave the way for more substantive political reforms in the Arab region. Yet Washington must not pursue a peace process at the expense of democratization.

The following paragraphs identify country-specific issues discussed by the panelists.

Egypt

American pressures on the Egyptian regime between 2003 and 2005, though failing to achieve meaningful democratic change, contributed to significant openings in Egypt’s political space. There is no evidence that this pressure undermined Egypt’s cooperation with Washington on critical issues. Egypt has an interest in Arab-Israeli peace, a stable Iraq and curbing Iranian threats independently of US interests, says Samer Shehata. There is also no evidence that the stability of the Egyptian government was or will be in any way compromised by political reform.



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Despite doubts about its commitment to democratic principles, there is no evidence that the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest Islamist group, has the organizational capacity or ideological inclination to come to power through force.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, domestic security and reform are complementary, and one cannot be pursued without the other, said Mona Yacoubian. Many see Hezbollah as the biggest obstacle to pursuing the two objectives. Its dubious commitment to democratic politics and to building strong state institutions, its insistence on maintaining arms, and its frequent recklessness as evidenced by its role in instigating a war with Israel in 2006 contribute to this perception. However, Hezbollah is viewed in Lebanon as a credible and legitimate representative of the country's Shi'a community, and therefore it cannot be ostracized from the political process.

At the same time, the current power-sharing formula in Lebanon is becoming increasingly incompatible with the country's political and demographic realities. Thus, long-term stability and successful reform demand recalculating Lebanon's current political formula in order to bring Hezbollah into the realm of peaceful politics and to integrate its military capabilities into the national military.

Pakistan

The U.S. relationship with former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf exemplifies the transactional relationships that Washington maintains with many autocrats who receive US support in exchange for security cooperation. This pattern has pronounced itself at every turn in the history of U.S.-Pakistan relations, starting from the U.S. tacit support for the 1958 coup to U.S. silence over Musharraf's democratic transgressions. The United States must move beyond a transactional relationship with Islamabad and shift to a long-term strategic relationship with the democratically chosen representatives of the Pakistani people whomever they may be and not with individual autocrats.

Policy Conclusions*

Panelists offered the following general and country-specific recommendations on how U.S. policymakers can pursue an effective strategy for promoting reform in the Muslim world:

* Policy Conclusions from Group Panel Discussions at Passing the Baton 2009 were not necessarily achieved by group consensus. In some instances, individual panel members may have been in disagreement with the larger group. For specific information on each panel's contents, please see the comprehensive online archive at www.usip.org/baton2009.



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1. Resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict without putting demands for Arab reform on hold.
2. Support democratic principles and norms, but not individual figures and groups.
3. Respect democratic outcomes and recognize elected leaders whomever they may be.
4. Promote reform in an even-handed way without picking winners and losers.
5. Maintain a credible, consistent rhetoric on issues of reform and human rights.
6. Improve US credibility as a promoter of democracy in the Middle East by resolving major conflicts and by promoting democracy at home.
7. Support indigenous proposals for democratic reform rather than Washington-centric strategies.
8. In Egypt, do not support individual contenders in the country's political succession and use any potential succession as an opportunity to promote structural political reforms.
9. In Pakistan, support the withdrawal of the army from politics.
10. In Lebanon:
 - a. Do not support one faction against the other.
 - b. Seek a better understanding of Hezbollah's long-term interests instead of reducing it to a Syrian or an Iranian proxy.
 - c. Promote political reforms that can help Lebanon move beyond feudal politics.
 - d. Engage Syria and seek its support for Lebanese sovereignty and stability.